

Summer 2013

## Vision TV: Mission 2013: "Do this in memory of me" – Part 2

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### Recommended Citation

Gittins, A. (2013). Vision TV: Mission 2013: "Do this in memory of me" – Part 2. *Spiritan Magazine*, 37 (3). Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/spiritan-tc/vol37/iss3/7>

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# “Do this in memory of me”

Anthony Gittins CSSp

In the narrow sense we speak of Eucharist with a capital E: the Mass. But Jesus speaks of much more than that. So we can speak of small-e eucharist in the broader sense of living our daily lives as sacrament, as a sign that points to Jesus, and as an act of thanksgiving. These keep the memory of Jesus alive. And we can do that under four headings: Encounter, Table Fellowship, Foot Washing and Boundary Crossing. Then we will know how to “go and do this in memory of him.”

## Encounter

We start with Jesus’ whole life in ministry as Encounter. Viktor Frankl, therapist and survivor of Auschwitz, said, “To love you must encounter.” You simply cannot love unless you encounter. You can’t love people in general — there are no people in general, only particular people, specific people.

Jesus didn’t love “the poor” — that’s an abstraction, a category and you can’t love an abstraction. Jesus loved actual flesh-and-blood people, those he encountered one by one day after day.

So let me examine myself. Who do I encounter? How genuinely interested am I in the people I meet? Who do I avoid? What is the quality or superficiality of my encounters?

How willing am I to seek those I no longer encounter or to go out of my way to encounter people I have not yet met? If I measure myself by the measure of Jesus then I fall far, far short.

At the Last Supper imagine Jesus saying, “Do you remember when we encountered the little children and you got indignant and wanted to get rid of them? Or the five thousand hungry people — not even counting the women and the children — and you asked me to send them away because you

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“To love you must encounter.”  
— Victor Frankl

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could not be bothered? What about my encounter with the woman at the well? You were scandalized because I was talking with a woman, for God’s sake. And what about the woman who was bleeding? Or the woman who came with ointment and anointed me? Do you remember those occasions, those encounters?”

Then, maybe, at last, in their acute embarrassment the disciples learned something. Encounter is one way for us to “Do THIS in memory of Jesus.”

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## Table fellowship

The table serves symbolically as a gathering point so that, around it, the family or the community can be “re-membered”. Jesus had sat down at table with people all through his life.

So he wanted to do this with his friends one final time the night before he died.

St Luke’s gospel, in particular, can be read as a table-hopping gospel. In it Jesus is either at the table, on his way to the table or coming from the table. And it’s largely his table-fellowship that gets him killed. He deliberately seeks out and eats with all the wrong people, in all

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the wrong places, at all the wrong times. His table fellowship is radically inclusive. And so, one final time, he said to his close friends and to each of us, “Do THIS in memory of me.”

So — who do I eat with and who do I avoid? Do I cultivate high table friends or, like Jesus, do I make friends in low places? Who do I like to be seen with? Who do I never associate with?

Enemies can be turned into friends when they break bread and share wine. Think of Churchill and Stalin, Nixon and Mao, Gorbachev and Regan and all other world leaders who try to be civil during a state banquet. And think of Jesus eating in the house of Simon the leper, or with prostitutes and sinners, or with Zacchaeus, the despised tax collector, and so many nameless others. Accused of eating with tax collectors and sinners, he said, “Yes ... and so should you! Do THIS in memory of me.”

And yet, as we do this in his name, even at the Eucharistic table, we are a divided, separated, segregated community. We choose at our Eucharists not to eat with certain people who are different or enemies, until they change and become like us.

Table fellowship is also horizontal ministry because everyone is on the same level. Table fellowship indicates that no one is superior and





no one is inferior. This is the community of equals that Jesus is building. So again he says to you and me, “Do THIS in memory of me.”

### **Foot washing**

Jesus is very insistent on this. The master becomes the servant, the first becomes the last, the superior becomes the inferior. It’s a deeply poignant action. We can see the mutuality, we can see the balance and the dignity involved. Whoever has the position of superior, the one-up person in charge, must also undertake to be the inferior, the one-down person in service. As Jesus said to his disciples, “As I have done, so you must do. Do THIS in memory of me.”

Mothers and nurses and caregivers of all kinds know foot-washing day in and day out. But some of the rest of us have never washed a person’s feet, never bandaged a wound, never assisted a sick person. Where is the foot-washing in our lives?

### **Boundary crossing**

Again, this is an absolute requirement for anyone who follows the way of Jesus. The boundaries that Jesus crosses are not international frontiers. He doesn’t cross oceans and he travels only as far as his feet will take him. The boundaries mark the edge of our own comfort zone — often just beyond the edge of our own fingertips. There’s always a temptation to stay within our own comfort zone rather than to encounter those who are separated from us by gender or social class or religion or privilege or deprivation.

Jesus lived in a world in which people like us tended to stay with their own kind and avoid unnecessary contamination. But just beyond your fingertips you can meet the other — which is exactly what Jesus came to do: to reach out and to embrace. And you can only embrace the other if you open your arms. A fist has to turn into an open hand. Yet that’s what Jesus does as he crosses the boundaries of separation to create a new community of inclusion.

A major reason for the astonishing and rapid growth of the early church is that those early Christians took very, very seriously the command to love one’s neighbour as oneself — but with a twist. One’s neighbour was understood to include two groups of people: those I already know and those I have not yet met.

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So people who needed help would find Christians, seeking them out and offering help — shockingly counter-cultural.

Four hundred years earlier Plato had written about the perfect society. In his Republic everyone lived in harmony. But the poor and the needy and the naked and the homeless and the criminals were nowhere to be seen. They were removed, left outside, beyond the city walls. Plato declared that anyone who was interested in such human refuse was an idiot. Anyone who cared about the poor and the needy must be mad. His was the ultimate gated community.

So Christians were evidently bad because Jesus taught that they must reach out to the poor and the needy because these outcasts were specially loved by God. And many people thought he was soft in the head. But he insisted: “They will know that you are my disciples if you love one another as I have loved you.”

So the little bands in the early Christian community grew by breaking through their own boundaries and reaching out to embrace the forgotten, the despised and the condemned. At the Last Supper when Jesus was reminding the apostles what he had been doing every single day of his life he told them, “Go, reach out, look for the poor and needy, look for the forgotten and the silenced, look for anyone who is excluded by skin or religion or gender or class or incivility and reach out. Turn that closed fist into an open hand and embrace the sisters and the brothers you’ve never even met. You’ve seen me do it. Remember. Go and do THIS in memory of me.”

And so, where shall we do it? We just start from where we are: just reach out a hand or move a foot forward. Then we will find ourselves at the margin, at the boundary, at the meeting place where it all begins.

At the end of Mass the celebrant says, “Go — Ite, missa est — Go, you are sent.” You have received Eucharist. Now you are Eucharist. You have become what you have received. And today’s Eucharist has to last you for a whole week, so go out and be Eucharist until next week. Then come back and do it all over again. You are gathered around the table at your

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## Where is the foot-washing in our lives?

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Eucharist in order to be scattered around your neighbourhoods. You feed on the body of Christ, yet you should go out more hungry than when you came in. Hungrier and thirstier for God’s justice because now the Eucharist has put an edge on your appetite. Use this spiritual nourishment so that you can continue to do this — all of it — in memory of Jesus.

Wherever you go, go and do Eucharist, Do it in memory of Jesus. In that way you will never forget him. You will never forget who he is for you and you will always remember who you are. And never become separated or lost or “dismembered.” ■

# I give you Eucharist

Bishop Christian Hollings, Anthony Gittins CSSp

He was old and tired, pushing his cart down the alley, a dumpster diver up to his armpits in someone’s garbage.

I wanted to tell him about Eucharist, but the look in his eyes, the despair on his face — was it fear or madness? The shame of needing someone else’s garbage told me to just forget it. Instead I smiled and said “Hi” and gave him a couple of dollars — Eucharist.

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She lived alone, daughter murdered, husband dead, health gone. She talked incessantly and with amazing and tedious detail — at you but not with you. Endless words spewed out, the only proof that she was still alive. So I tried to listen — and gave her Eucharist.

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They were sitting on the sidewalk at the street corner. Human garbage by some people’s reckoning. Not respectable. Not the right ethnicity though this land was theirs before others took it from them. She asked for a handout. He sat looking at the ground. I had the day off and plenty of time. So we went for a meal at a fast food joint. They ordered what they wanted. I paid the bill — Eucharist.

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Good God, when will we learn? You can’t just talk about Eucharist. You can’t philosophize or dogmatize about it. You can only do it — sometimes laughing, sometimes crying, sometimes almost unconsciously, and sometimes when you’re singing out loud. It can happen in the depth of pain or in deep peace, or in

abject shame. It doesn’t have to be planned. And it’s never deserved.

Eucharist can be found when you look into the eyes of another person. It can be sensed in a smile or felt in a reconciling or healing embrace. It may whisper in the leaves on a summer’s day or in the voice of someone who just needs to talk. And you may whisper it in someone’s ear or hold it in your arms as a gesture of love. Eucharist is not complicated, but it surely is the great mystery of human life.

“I give you my word, my hand, my time, my attention, I give you the very best of myself. I give you my life. I give you Eucharist,” says Jesus. “Do this yourself every one of you, everywhere, anywhere. And when you do, remember me. Remember me.”